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14. ABSTRACT For over 50 years, the United States military has remained on the Korean Peninsula in large numbers due to its commitment to defend South Korea (The Republic of Korea, or ROK) against aggression from North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK). The U.S. and the ROK have built a strong, successful alliance based on the mutual defense of South Korea. However, for several years, the commitment of U.S. permanently stationed forces in South Korea in support of this alliance has come under scrutiny. Many institutions, military and political alike, have called for a reduction in the overall number of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, even to the point of complete withdrawal. The thesis of this paper is that prospective U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) troop realignments out of South Korea would produce adverse effects to the U.S.-ROK alliance, would not help the overall stability on the Korean Peninsula, and will degrade the United States' ability to diplomatically engage North Korea. This paper concludes with a recommendation to USFK to delay any prospective troop realignment out of South Korea until further progress can be made in the relationship with North Korea with respect to deterrence of possible North Korean aggression.					
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**ADVERSE EFFECTS OF PROSPECTIVE U.S. FORCES KOREA TROOP
REALIGNMENTS**

By

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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14 February 2005

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Abstract

For over 50 years, the United States military has remained on the Korean Peninsula in large numbers due to its commitment to defend South Korea (The Republic of Korea, or ROK) against aggression from North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK). The U.S. and the ROK have built a strong, successful alliance based on the mutual defense of South Korea. However, for several years, the commitment of U.S. permanently stationed forces in South Korea in support of this alliance has come under scrutiny. Many institutions, military and political alike, have called for a reduction in the overall number of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, even to the point of complete withdrawal. The thesis of this paper is that prospective U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) troop realignments out of South Korea would produce adverse effects to the U.S.-ROK alliance, would not help the overall stability on the Korean Peninsula, and will degrade the United States' ability to diplomatically engage North Korea. This paper concludes with a recommendation to USFK to delay any prospective troop realignment out of South Korea until further progress can be made in the relationship with North Korea with respect to deterrence of possible North Korean aggression.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States has maintained a significant military presence in South Korea (the Republic of Korea, or ROK) since the Korean War of 1950-53. Because there has never been an actual formal end to this war (there was only an “armed truce” signed between South Korea and North Korea), the United States military has remained on the Korean Peninsula in large numbers due to its commitment to defend the ROK against aggression from North Korea (the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, or DPRK). Ironically, when this “armed truce,” or armistice, was signed on July 27, 1953, the two armies facing each other were not the North Koreans and the South Koreans, but the United States and the Chinese.¹ Since that time early in the 1950’s, the Cold War has been ended, and the character of U.S.-China relations has greatly improved. However, the relationship with the DPRK has remained cold, at best, for over 50 years, and does not show any sign of improving in the near, or even distant, future. In contrast, the United States and the ROK have built a strong, successful alliance based on the mutual defense of the ROK. “Over the past five decades, South Korea and the United States [have] developed numerous political, institutional, and operational arrangements, enabling the two allies to collaborate fully in deterring North Korea’s attack and in defending South Korea should deterrence fail.”² For several years, the commitment of U.S. permanently stationed forces in South Korea in support of this alliance has come under scrutiny. Many institutions, military and political alike, have called for a reduction in the overall number of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, even to the point of complete withdrawal. Much in the literature supports such a position. However, there is

¹ Ralph N. Clough, Deterrence and Defense in Korea (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution 1976), 2.

² Yong-Sup Han, “Readjusting the Role of U.S. Forces in Korea in a Changing World,” Korea and World Affairs, 28 (Spring 2004): 31.

good cause to rethink the position of partial or complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula. The thesis of this paper is that prospective U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) troop realignments out of South Korea would produce adverse effects to the U.S.-ROK alliance, would not help the overall stability on the Korean Peninsula, and will degrade the United States' ability to diplomatically engage North Korea. This paper concludes with a recommendation to USFK to delay any prospective troop realignment out of South Korea until further progress can be made in the relationship with North Korea with respect to deterrence of possible North Korean aggression.

CURRENT ROLE OF USFK FORCES IN SOUTH KOREA

Discussions in the literature tend to portray the U.S. military presence in South Korea as much more political than military in nature. Certainly the presence of U.S. troops is political in nature, as Carl von Clausewitz points out that the use of the military is "...a true political instrument..."³ Much more important, however, is the critical military purpose for which U.S. forces serve. The role of U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula is the defense of South Korea from North Korean attack, and for deterrence against North Korean aggression of all forms, including the development and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). South Korea is an important strategic and economic ally to the United States in the context of the U.S.'s relationship with other Asian countries in the area, namely China and Japan. "About a third of America's global trade is with East Asia...which is also home to two of the world's largest economies: China and Japan."⁴ Instability on the Korean Peninsula must be minimized, if not

³ Carl von Clausewitz, On War, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York: Random House, 1993), 99.

⁴ Robert Ayson and Brendan Taylor, "Attacking North Korea: Why War Might Be Preferred," Comparative Strategy, 23 (July-September 2004): 266.

eliminated altogether, because an outbreak of hostilities on the peninsula would cause not only civilian and military casualties of immense proportions, but also would cause an intolerable strain on U.S. relations with China and Japan, not to mention the international community. Additionally, it is of vital importance to the United States and to the international community to deter North Korea from continued development or use of its growing nuclear capability and propensity to sell ballistic missiles and nuclear technology to rogue states. “The U.S. government’s position is that North Korea’s nuclear programs are a challenge to the entire international community and the global non-proliferation regime...”⁵

Even though the standoff between the DPRK and the U.S.-ROK alliance has lasted over 50 years, the United States should not think that the threat from North Korea has diminished. “After 50 years of confrontation and isolation, it would be a mistake to assume that North Korea has reformed its behavior.”⁶ A Department of Defense report to Congress in the year 2000 stated, “North Korea remains the major threat to stability and security in Northeast Asia and is the country most likely to involve the United States in a large-scale war.”⁷ To further amplify the real threat North Korea poses, the report states that, “Pyongyang’s [the North Korean capitol] military goal is to reunify the [Korean] peninsula by force. North Korea’s fundamental war-fighting strategy mandates achievement of surprise, prosecution of a short and violent war, prevention of major

⁵ U.S. Institute of Peace, A Comprehensive Resolution of the Korean War, Special Report 106 (Washington, DC: 2003), 3.

⁶ Alvin A. Perkins, “U.S. Policy Towards North Korea with Respect to Ballistic Missiles,” (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA: 2001), 4.

⁷ Department of Defense, 2000 Report to Congress: Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula (Washington, DC: 12 September 2000), 6.

United States reinforcement of the peninsula, and negation of the Republic of Korea's mobilization.”⁸

The backbone of the North Korean threat to the ROK is its massive armed force. For such a geographically small country, it boasts a military that ranks among the largest in the world. The U.S. Defense Department's 2000 Report to Congress details this formidable force:

The North Korean Armed Forces today are the fifth largest in the world. The ground forces, numbering one million active duty soldiers, provide the bulk of the North's offensive war-fighting capability and are the world's third largest army. They are supported by an air force of over 1,600 aircraft and a navy of more than 800 ships. Over 6 million reserves augment the active duty personnel. Seventy percent of their active force, to include 700,000 troops, 8,000 artillery systems, and 2,000 tanks, is garrisoned within 100 miles of the Demilitarized Zone. Much of this force is protected by underground facilities, including over four thousand underground facilities in the forward area alone. From their current locations these forces can attack with minimal preparations. North Korea fields an artillery force of over 12,000 self-propelled and towed weapon systems. Without moving any artillery pieces, the North could sustain up to 500,000 rounds an hour against Combined Forces Command defenses for several hours. The artillery force includes 500 long-range systems deployed over the past decade. The proximity of these long-range systems to the Demilitarized Zone threatens all of Seoul with devastating attacks. North Korea's Special Operations Forces are the largest in the world. They consist of over 100,000 elite personnel and are significant force multipliers providing the capability to simultaneously attack both our forward and rear forces.⁹

Over the years, there have been adjustments in the number of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. Between the armistice signing in 1953 and the early 1970's, U.S. troop numbers gradually declined from nearly 500,000 to approximately today's 37,000. The latest prospective troop reduction—decreasing troop strength by

⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁹ Ibid., 8-10.

approximately 12,000—represents the most significant proposed change in recent years. This is significant not only in just the sheer number of troops in relation to the size of the DPRK military, but also because of the DPRK's recent revelations regarding its development of nuclear capabilities and willingness to use or sell such capabilities. "In October 2002, North Korea admitted that it had been undertaking a clandestine nuclear weapons program, contrary to the terms of the 1994 Agreed Framework. Since that time, North Korea has expelled International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors, withdrawn from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), test-fired up to three antishipping missiles into the Sea of Japan, while also claiming that it already has nuclear weapons and that it might conduct a 'physical demonstration' or export them."¹⁰

While the United States has taken several measures to pressure North Korea into behaving in an internationally acceptable way, including suspending heavy fuel oil shipments to North Korea, placing long-range bombers on heightened alert for possible deployment to the Pacific, and threatening blockades of North Korean ships and aircraft suspected of trafficking in weapons of mass destruction, these measures are not in and of themselves enough to change North Korea's methods of operation. A formidable military presence, the backbone of which is the United States forces under the command of USFK, must be in place and stay in place until a cardinal change takes place in the leadership and behavior of North Korea.

In light of the significant DPRK military threat to the ROK and the international nuclear dilemma the DPRK presents, the United States should not withdraw troops from South Korea at this time. Even acknowledged by ROK scholars, "The role and

¹⁰ Robert Ayson and Brendan Taylor, "Attacking North Korea: Why War Might Be Preferred," Comparative Strategy, 23 (July-September 2004): 268.

importance of USFK is indisputable in relation to deterrence and defense for South Korea.”¹¹

PROSPECTIVE REALIGNMENT OF USFK FORCES FROM SOUTH KOREA

Current realignment plans for USFK forces include moving troops further south from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and also moving a significant number of troops out of the ROK altogether. This paper does not attempt to analyze the movement of troops within the ROK to positions south of current locations. This aspect of the current prospective troop realignment keeps U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula for the USFK mission of deterrence of DPRK military aggression and defense of the ROK from attack. However, it is the issue of this paper to propose that the second aspect of the current prospective troop realignment—that of moving troops off of the Korean Peninsula altogether—be delayed until further progress can be made in the relationship with North Korea with respect to deterrence of possible North Korean aggression.

The U.S. Department of Defense plans to withdraw about one third of its current 37,000 troops over the next two years. These planned troop adjustments are part of the overall transformation of the U.S. military into a lighter, leaner, more mobile, more lethal force. Additionally, the costs of keeping large numbers of troops overseas are increasingly burdensome to an already stretched U.S. defense budget; therefore, troop reductions for the mere sake of saving money is attractive to the Department of Defense and lawmakers alike.

¹¹ Yong-Sup Han, “Readjusting the Role of U.S. Forces in Korea in a Changing World,” Korea and World Affairs, 28 (Spring 2004): 32.

ADVERSE EFFECTS DUE TO REALIGNMENT OF U.S. FORCES FROM SOUTH KOREA

Because of the DPRK military threat to South Korea and the nuclear menace to the international community it poses, moving USFK forces out of South Korea prematurely will have overall adverse effects on the Korean Peninsula as follows: USFK troop realignments will have adverse effects on U.S.-ROK relations; USFK troop realignments will not help overall stability on the Korean Peninsula; and USFK troop realignments will degrade the United States' ability to diplomatically engage the DPRK.

USFK Force Realignments Will Have Adverse Effects on U.S.-ROK Relations

Moving USFK military forces out of South Korea will have adverse effects on the U.S.-ROK alliance in the following areas: The ROK will consider the United States as having broken defense commitments; the ROK will be left vulnerable to attack due to lack of adequate military advancements; and the ROK will question the United States' commitment of defense should North Korea attack.

The ROK will consider the United States as having broken defense commitments.

A significant factor to remember is that the Korean War has not officially ended. Even though there has been an "armed truce" which has been in place for over 50 years, withdrawing U.S. troops would be tantamount to leaving an ally on the battlefield to be run over by the enemy. "By deploying USFK in a forward area as a 'tripwire'¹² in order to defend and retaliate against the North Korean attack, the United States has successfully deterred North Korea's attack."¹³ Although this is an extreme picture of the U.S.-ROK alliance situation, it still deserves some consideration. "Abrogation of the U.S. security

¹² "Tripwire" is the term used to describe the first line of defense function of U.S. forces on the DMZ in the event of North Korean attack.

¹³ Ibid., 32.

treaty with South Korea and abandonment of that long-standing ally...could seriously degrade the importance of military power as a U.S. foreign policy implement, undercut U.S. interests in national credibility, and perhaps encourage aggression against other U.S. friends around the world. Civil war on the Korean Peninsula probably would erupt. The Republic of Korea and Japan might feel needs to develop their own nuclear weapons.”¹⁴ The deterrence of North Korea and the defense of South Korea is firmly grounded in the presence of USFK military forces, for “...it is impossible to talk about the [U.S.-ROK] alliance without focusing on USFK.”¹⁵

The ROK will be left vulnerable to attack due to lack of adequate military advancements. A main consideration regarding moving USFK troops out of the ROK is that what USFK will lack in numbers of troops will be made up in advanced military technology. However, the question needs to be addressed as to *when* that military technology will arrive on the Korean Peninsula. As of yet, USFK has not put in place advanced weaponry and air defenses necessary to adequately defend against the massive DPRK forces, artillery, and short-range missiles. “The recent relocation of USFK [forces] from forward areas to rear areas is based upon the premise that this will not reduce U.S. deterrent power because the mobilization speed and superiority of U.S. precision-guided weaponry will compensate for the increased distance from North Korea’s front line. However, South Koreans are concerned about the possibility that the United States might reduce its deterrent power for South Korea to defend Seoul in the

¹⁴ John M. Collins, Korean Crisis, 1994: Military Geography, Military Balance, Military Options, CRS Report for Congress. Congressional Research Service (Washington, DC: 11 April 1994), 15.

¹⁵ Yong-Sup Han, “Readjusting the Role of U.S. Forces in Korea in a Changing World,” Korea and World Affairs, 28 (Spring 2004): 32.

initial stage of war.”¹⁶ With a very robust economic growth in recent years, South Korea has gained the ability to take significant steps in growing and modernizing their own military capabilities, diminishing the need for a large U.S. military presence. However, there are critical technologies that are essential to the defense of their country that the ROK lacks at this time that will take several years to put in place. Additionally, the USFK must take into account not only placing advanced military technology in the ROK, but also the training time necessary to bring ROK forces up to minimum proficiency levels to operate such technology. “If the United States were to reposition the 2nd ID’s [USFK 2nd Infantry Division] assets, it would not be certain whether South Korea could successfully defend itself at an early stage of a second Korean war.”¹⁷

The ROK will doubt the United States’ commitment for defense of the ROK after North Korean attack. Currently, the United States Department of Defense appears to be consumed with activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. military is stretched thin and could not adequately address similar operations at the same time in another theater such as the Korean Peninsula. This is evidenced by the fact that late in 2004 nearly 3,600 troops were pulled out of South Korea for the purpose of redeployment to Iraq. Additionally, the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps are now asking retirees to return to active service in record numbers just to be able to continue operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Tripwire not only played a significant role in deterring North Korea’s attack, but also guaranteed the U.S. commitment to defend South Korea by sending more troops to South Korea later.”¹⁸ A significant withdrawal of USFK forces would signal a

¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸ Yong-Sup Han, “Readjusting the Role of U.S. Forces in Korea in a Changing World,” Korea and World Affairs, 28 (Spring 2004): 34.

lessening commitment by the United States or even weakness on its part to defend South Korea in the event of attack.

USFK Force Realignments Will Not Enhance Stability on the Korean Peninsula

Moving USFK forces out of the ROK will not enhance stability on the Korean Peninsula as some authors have maintained. Withdrawal of USFK troops out of South Korea is one of the demands coming from North Korea for it to reenter talks with the international community regarding nuclear non-proliferation. However, moving USFK forces out of the ROK will encourage the DPRK to provoke the U.S.-ROK alliance at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and will signal to the DPRK that the United States does not take its nuclear threat seriously.

Realignments will encourage the DPRK to provoke the U.S.-ROK alliance at the DMZ.

As has been discussed earlier in this paper, a critical aspect of the USFK military role at the DMZ is one of deterrence from DPRK aggression “...through denial by maintaining overall balance between USFK and South Korean forces on the one side and North Korean forces on the other side.”¹⁹ Although the ROK has a sizeable military force, numerically it is still inferior to DPRK forces.²⁰ The United States has only invested 37,000 military troops to the U.S.-ROK alliance. To further aggravate the situation, North Korea has approximately 70% of its active-duty ground forces and 80%

¹⁹ Ibid., 32.

²⁰ ROK forces are as follows: 520,000 Army, 85,000 Navy (including Marines), and 53,000 Air Force. ROK hardware is as follows: 1,800 tanks, 4,400 pieces of artillery, 580 helicopters, 140 rocket launchers, 600 air defense guns, 760 missiles of various types, 170 naval vessels, and 335 air force craft. These figures are from the CRS Report to Congress by John M. Collins, Korean Crisis, 1994: Military Geography, Military Balance, Military Options, CRS Report for Congress. Congressional Research Service (Washington, DC: 11 April 1994), 7.

of its firepower concentrated near the DMZ.²¹ It is evident that USFK must keep a very strong military force for superiority over North Korea for deterrence at the DMZ.

Another consideration is deployment time to the Korean Peninsula should the DPRK decide to provoke USFK forces at the DMZ. When The People's Republic of China (PRC) tested short-range ballistic missiles near Taiwan in 1995/6, the United States responded by dispatching a pair of aircraft carrier battle groups to the area. It took on the order of two weeks to get these warships into the area.²² With the current operations tempo of the U.S. armed forces, a two-week response time to the Korean Peninsula would most likely be a best-case scenario.

The wars in which the U.S. military fights today (such as Desert Shield/Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom) testify to the need for large numbers of ground troops and ground troop support to accomplish the mission. Technological advances in military hardware in and of themselves cannot win wars and keep the peace. A war on the Korean Peninsula would not be different in this respect. The proximity of Seoul, South Korea to the DMZ (approximately 25 miles) provides another reason for a robust USFK troop presence to keep the DPRK from provoking hostilities at the DMZ. One author even noted, "Korea is a country where the decisive military arm is likely to be the infantry if it is adequately backed by mortar and artillery fire and close air support."²³

²¹ Robert Ayson and Brendan Taylor, "Attacking North Korea: Why War Might Be Preferred," *Comparative Strategy*, 23 (July-September 2004): 266.

²² Thomas Donnelly, *Rebasing, Revisited*, (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, December 2004), 3.

²³ Ralph N. Clough, *Deterrence and Defense in Korea* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution 1976), 6-7.

Realignments will signal to the DPRK that the United States does not take the North's nuclear threat seriously.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the DPRK acknowledged in late 2002 that it had engaged in nuclear development activities in direct violation of the 1994 Agreed Framework. The DPRK has shown the international community its total disregard for humane international relations and lack of understanding of the necessity of reentering non-proliferation discussions. Any sign by USFK indicating a diminishing stance at the DMZ and South Korea in its entirety will send a direct signal to North Korea that the U.S. is not taking the DPRK nuclear threat seriously. It is even conceivable that a withdrawal of USFK forces could lead to the acceleration of North Korea's nuclear weapons development program.

One of the demands North Korea stipulates in order to return to the negotiating table on nuclear disarmament is for the United States' complete military withdrawal from the Korean Peninsula. If the United States acquiesced to this demand, at least in part, this would signal to the DPRK that the U.S. is indifferent about its rising nuclear threat. Additionally, as demonstrated by the war in Iraq, ground troops—significant numbers of them—were necessary to complete the plan to topple Saddam's regime. Any regime change in North Korea would take a similarly large number of ground troops. Given that North Korea has been labeled part of the "axis of evil," it is not time to be moving troops out of South Korea, thereby allowing North Korea the freedom to accelerate any of its military or nuclear programs.

U.S. Force Realignments Will Degrade U.S. Ability to Diplomatically Engage DPRK

The DPRK has clearly demonstrated its tendency to ignore the United States and the international community. In order to diplomatically engage North Korea, the United States needs a firm foundation on which to place that diplomacy. USFK forces provide the threat of military force as a foundation to diplomatic efforts with the DPRK. “A clear U.S. commitment remains essential to ROK security and peninsular stability. The way to block Pyongyang’s military option is to insure that the ROK-U.S. alliance is healthy and responsive. A strong and credible ROK-U.S. military alliance provides the foundation of deterrence supporting the increasing pace of diplomatic activity with the DPRK.”²⁴ North Korea is a country whose abhorrent economic condition is not a concern in the minds of its tyrannical leaders. The suffering and poverty of the North Korean people do not affect DPRK leaders. Most diplomatic options are ineffective due to these factors. Only by the threat of military force does diplomacy have any hope of success. That military force comes directly from USFK maintaining a strong presence where it is most valuable to deter this threat—on the Korean Peninsula.

COUNTERARGUMENTS

Themes in current literature countering this author’s position on delaying withdrawal of USFK forces from the Korean Peninsula support the following counterarguments: South Korea’s strong economic development enhances its ability to defend itself; Realignment of USFK forces will improve diplomatic relations with the DPRK; and The DPRK will continue its nuclear weapons program regardless of USFK force structure.

²⁴ Department of Defense, 2000 Report to Congress: Military Situation on the Korean Peninsula (Washington, DC: 12 September 2000), 28-29.

South Korea's Strong Economic Development Enhances its Ability to Defend Itself

The South Korean economy has undergone tremendous growth over the past several years. It is fast becoming an economic stronghold in the Pacific-Asian arena. Due in part to their strong economy, “ROK forces are undergoing modernization and improvements in many key areas through indigenous weapons production, co-production, and procurement through Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and direct commercial channels.”²⁵ However, this modernization will take several years, even decades, and cannot be realistically relied upon to cover current vulnerabilities caused by prospective USFK force realignments. Additionally, the issue of cost sharing with the U.S. for the U.S.-ROK alliance has been raised due to the strong South Korean economy. “Economic success makes it possible for the ROK to share a larger portion of security-related costs on the Korean Peninsula. However, it must be noted that these contributions come while the ROK is also modernizing its force structure, establishing a more modern command and control system, improving the quality of life for its armed forces, and experience increasing political pressures to expand spending on domestic programs.”²⁶ However, a South Korean author cautions that, “The U.S. advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities are an essential part of defending South Korea should deterrence fail. Its ISR assets are estimated to cost \$15 billion, which [the] South Korean economy could not afford as of today in the short run.”²⁷ Therefore, despite a strong and growing economy, the ROK is not currently in a position to absorb the costs associated with the current prospective USFK troop withdrawals.

²⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁶ Ibid., 19.

²⁷ Yong-Sup Han, “Readjusting the Role of U.S. Forces in Korea in a Changing World,” Korea and World Affairs, 28 (Spring 2004): 35.

Realignment of U.S. Forces Will Improve Diplomatic Relations with the DPRK

One author makes the argument that the DPRK is much weaker militarily than the ROK. “The past 15 years have led to severe economic and military decline in North Korea, and it is now much weaker than South Korea. Intuitively, it follows that this nation is fearful of the United States.”²⁸ North Korea, being fearful of the United States, has demanded security agreements in which the U.S. would withdraw all USFK troops out of the ROK. Because President Bush labeled North Korea as part of the “axis of evil” and they have witnessed U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the argument would tend to be solidified that the DPRK is fearful of the United States, and that a withdrawal of USFK troops would ease DPRK fears and improve diplomatic relations with the United States. However, the DPRK has already demonstrated to the United States and the international community their firm stance on nuclear issues and their firmness in not reducing any of their conventional military strength, especially along the DMZ. One author supports this argument that, “...there’s a sliver of a chance that the reduction of U.S. forces could help reduce North-South tensions.”²⁹ It stands to argue that if USFK force withdrawal will not have a positive effect on the U.S.-DPRK diplomatic relations, then it should not be carried out. On the contrary, keeping USFK forces in the ROK will enhance the United States’ diplomatic capabilities with the DPRK by signaling the U.S.’s commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and intention on keeping stability on the Korean Peninsula.

²⁸ Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, Nuclear North Korea—A Debate on Engagement Strategies (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 46.

²⁹ Peter Brooks, “Defending South Korea,” Far Eastern Economic Review, 167 (24 June 2004): 24.

The DPRK Will Continue Its Nuclear Weapons Program Regardless of USFK Force Structure

In the recent past, North Korea has clearly demonstrated its commitment to developing nuclear capabilities and its willingness to sell advanced military technologies to rogue states. It has been argued that the DPRK will continue its nuclear weapons program regardless of the U.S.-ROK force structure on the Korean Peninsula, and thus USFK forces should be withdrawn. The DPRK relies on this nuclear capability—or the threat of nuclear capability—to deter their idea of U.S.-ROK aggression. The DPRK also relies upon this capability to generate income by selling it and delivery systems to rogue states. North Korea “...engages in the illicit trade of both weapons (including selling ballistic missiles to Libya, Iran, and Syria) and narcotics (such as heroin, which it transports to criminals in Western countries). Most ominously, as we all know, it has secretly developed nuclear weapons, breaking a number of signed agreements.”³⁰

Additionally, the United States’ Secretary of Defense has stated that, “We are capable of winning decisively in one [Iraq] and swiftly defeating in the case of the other [North Korea]...let there be no doubt about it.”³¹ This, of course, was a comment made with the understanding of moving USFK forces out of South Korea. The United States still brings a formidable military force to bear to any situation. “A North Korean expert once told the author [of the referenced article] that what North Korea is most worried about is not South Korea’s force modernization and current U.S. forces in Korea, but U.S. war-fighting capabilities which will be mobilized and reinforced to South Korea

³⁰ Stephen J. Morris, “Averting the Unthinkable,” *The National Interest*, 74 (Winter 2003/2004): 100.

³¹ Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, *Nuclear North Korea—A Debate on Engagement Strategies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 41.

after hostilities commence.”³² Therefore, the argument is made that USFK forces in South Korea could be withdrawn because advanced military capabilities will make up for reduced troop strength. However, as pointed out earlier in this paper, “Korea is a country where the decisive military arm is likely to be the infantry if it is adequately backed by mortar and artillery fire and close air support.”³³ North Korea, regardless of the nuclear situation, still poses a formidable conventional threat within 25 miles of Seoul and USFK should not decrease in any way the ability to firmly defend against DPRK aggression. To reinforce U.S.-ROK forces, as also pointed out earlier, would take a minimum of two weeks, during which time DPRK forces would inflict grave damage to Seoul and other parts of South Korea.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the arguments presented in this paper, it is recommended that USFK delay any prospective troop realignments out of South Korea until further progress can be made in the relationship with North Korea with respect to deterrence of possible North Korean aggression. The decision to realign USFK troops south of Seoul, but not out of South Korea, has not been evaluated by this work.

CONCLUSION

“The imminent prospect of North Korea becoming a nuclear power is the most severe threat to the security of the United States and the rest of the Western world today. The anxiety that this prospect brings with it is compounded by the fact that there are no realistic prospects of solution to this threat being offered.”³⁴ This nuclear threat is

³² Yong-Sup Han, “Readjusting the Role of U.S. Forces in Korea in a Changing World,” Korea and World Affairs, 28 (Spring 2004): 33.

³³ Ralph N. Clough, Deterrence and Defense in Korea (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution 1976), 6-7.

³⁴ Stephen J. Morris, “Averting the Unthinkable,” The National Interest, 74 (Winter 2003/2004): 99.

inescapably intertwined with North Korea's conventional military threat on the Korean Peninsula and its diplomatic snubbing of the international community and the United States. One very important factor in dealing with the rogue state of North Korea is a firm U.S.-ROK alliance, the foundation of which is a robust USFK military presence in South Korea. For many years, there have been calls for withdrawal of USFK troops from the Korean Peninsula, citing the diminished utility and function of these forces in their role in the U.S.-ROK alliance. More recently, strains on the U.S. military due to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have dramatically increased the need to pull troops away from their critical function in the ROK. However, this paper has highlighted several reasons why partial or complete withdrawal of USFK troops from the Korean Peninsula should be delayed. The United States must remain determined and strong in the face of any rogue nation who threatens the safety and security of the United States and the international community.

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